

# 2015 Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Wetlands Program

## Site Evaluation Form – Instructions Document

12/31/14



This instructions document is to be used for guidance in completing the Site Evaluation Form as part of the 2015 RIM Wetlands Program application process. The form is fairly self-explanatory in its use.

There are five sections within document which should be scored. Check the appropriate checkbox or checkboxes within each section, as instructed. Left click your mouse on a checkbox to activate it. The score sheet automatically calculates the score. If an "Error" message appears, too many checkboxes are activated for that section. Uncheck the incorrect checkboxes to clear the "Error" message.

Scoring is a primary means of comparing the restoration benefits of each submitted application. To properly compare the merits of one application to another requires that they be scored following a consistent process. To ensure consistency, the following instructions have been prepared as a guide to completing the form. Please read the instructions for each section carefully prior to completing the form.

Each submitted application shall contain a completed Site Evaluation Form. When completing applications for group projects where more than one application is needed and submitted to restore a common depressional wetland basin, a single score sheet that represents the combined application area can be completed.

### **A. RESTORATION BENEFITS (*maximum score 50 points*):**

This is the primary scoring section of the form. It is used to define the benefits or restoration outcomes that will be achieved should an easement be secured on the site. It represents both the benefits of restoring both drained and altered wetlands along with the associated adjoining grassland buffer. The purpose of these criteria is to maximize diversity and ensure an adequate upland buffer exists in close proximity to restored wetlands to provide nesting and other wildlife habitat for waterfowl and other grassland species.

Drained wetland areas that are included as eligible land as part of an application but cannot be restored due to feasibility, ownership, or other reasons, should not be included as restorable wetlands when scoring an application under this section. These acres may be considered for scoring as part of the "Grassland to Basin Ratio" scoring component in this section, if they meet the grassland definition. For scoring purposes, crop cessation as a wetland restoration action only applies to wetlands meeting the "Farmed Only" definition.

This section is divided into two parts that represent two different wetland landscapes. The first part represents the restoration of drained and altered depressional wetland landscapes. The second part represents the restoration of drained and altered non-depressional wetland landscapes which includes sloped wetlands, floodplain wetlands, and wetland flats.

Refer to the county hydric soils list for guidance on landscape position (depressional, floodplain, flats, swales etc.) by hydric soil map unit, and hydric criteria. General hydric criteria are as follows:

<u>SYMBOL</u>	<u>CRITERIA</u>	<u>TYPICAL LANDSCAPE LOCATION</u>
1	Organic soils	Sites may be depressional or non-depressional (county specific).
2B2, 2B3	Saturation	Sites typically non-depressional - flats, drainage ways, bogs.
3	Ponded	Sites are depressional.
4	Flooding	Sites frequently flooded for long -very long duration.

The restoration of drained and altered depressional wetlands is a priority for the 2015 RIM Wetlands Program. As a result, applications with restorable drained and altered depressional wetlands have the potential to receive a higher score than other types of restorable drained and altered wetlands. Therefore, when completing the form, a landscape setting based on the characteristics of the site needs to be determined with scoring occurring in the appropriate part of this section. An error message will occur if scoring occurs in both parts of this section. If an application contains restorable drained and altered wetlands in both a depressional and non-depressional landscape settings, choose the setting that provides the greatest score.

The following definitions should be used when completing this section of the form:

**Depressional Wetland** – Wetlands occurring in topographic land depressions within steeply, mildly sloping, and in some cases flat landscapes. For the purposes of this definition, restored depressional wetlands will include *sedge meadows, seasonal or temporary wetlands, shallow marshes, and deep, open water marshes*.

**Non-Depressional Wetlands** – These types of wetlands occur in a variety of landscapes including areas with steeply or mildly sloping topography, riverine (floodplain), fringe areas to lakes and other larger water bodies, and large, relatively flat areas. For the purposes of this definition, restored non-depressional wetlands will include *fens, shrub swamps, floodplain forests, marshes, and bogs*

**Effectively Drained** - Hydrology has been effectively removed from a majority (more than 50 percent) of the wetland area allowing those acres to be planted in normal years of precipitation. No primary indicators of wetland hydrology (presence of hydrophytic vegetation, flooded or drown out crop, surface water, inclusion of non-cropped areas) are evident in the effectively drained portion of the wetland in those years of normal precipitation.

**Partially Drained** – Hydrology has been partially removed from a wetland that does not meet the definition of being “effectively drained”. A majority of the wetland area exhibits one or more primary indicators of wetland hydrology in years of normal precipitation.

**Farmed Only** – There is no record or evidence of current hydrologic manipulation (drainage) of the wetland and it is cropped during years of normal precipitation.

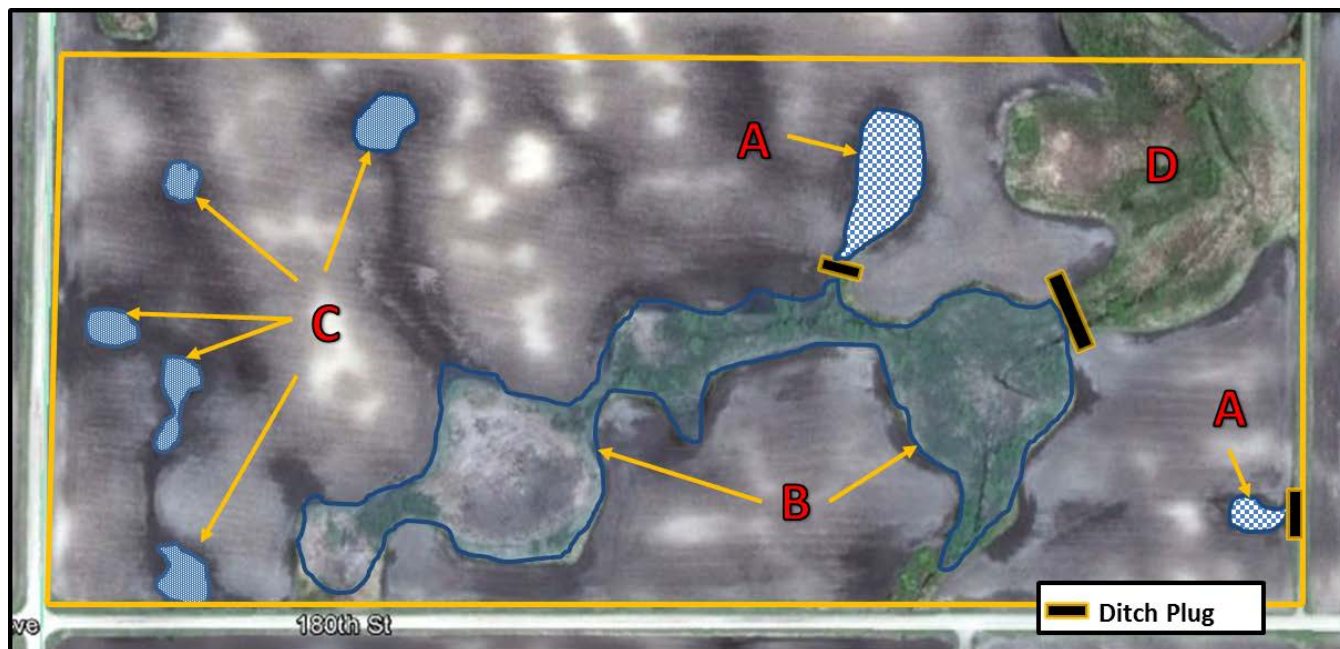
**Basin** - The basin shall be determined as the area of restored ponded water (temporary or permanent) under normal conditions of the wetland. The basin size is not necessarily the same as the restored wetland size. The size of the restored depressional wetland would typically be larger and includes the full extents of restored wetland hydrology and vegetation, including fringe areas that do not normally pond water.

**Size of Largest Basin** – Refers to the size of the largest depressional wetland basin than can be restored as a result of the easement (see basin definition).

**Total Grassland to Basin Ratio** – Refers to the ratio of all grasslands (existing and restorable) acres being offered as part of the application to the total restored wetland basin acres (see basin definition). Grasslands can be native upland prairie along with other predominantly grassed wetland flats and fringes that will provide suitable nesting cover and other wildlife habitat benefits and buffer for the wetland basin, once restored. Grasslands should not include forested areas that are included as part of the application.

Note: Previously restored wetlands shall be evaluated and scored based on their condition prior to their restoration.

### Section A Scoring Example:



Wetland Condition		Number of Basins	Size of Largest Basin	Grassland to Basin Ratio
A	Restorable Effectively Drained Depressional Basins	2	1.5 Acres	Easement Size = 58 Acres Total Restored Basins = 12.5 Acres Est. Grassland Area = 39 Acres <b>Grassland to Basin Ratio = 3.1 :1</b>
B	Restorable Partially Drained Depressional Basins	1	8 Acres	
C	Restorable Farmed Natural Depressional Basins	5	.6 Acres	
D	<u>Unrestorable</u> Drained Depressional Wetlands (< 50%)	Not Scored		

A. RESTORATION BENEFITS (maximum score 50)					Score			
					43			
Wetland Condition →		Effectively Drained	Partially Drained	Farmed Only	Size of Largest Basin (acres)	Total Grassland : Basin Ratio		
	No. of Basins	Check one (if applicable)	Check one (if applicable)	Check one (if applicable)	Check one (if applicable)	Check one (if applicable)		
Restorable Depressional Wetlands (Basins)	1	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	AND	AND		
	2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 5			< 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	< 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0
	3	<input type="checkbox"/> 20	<input type="checkbox"/> 14	<input type="checkbox"/> 7			6-10 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 7	> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2
	4	<input type="checkbox"/> 25	<input type="checkbox"/> 17	<input type="checkbox"/> 9			11-20 <input type="checkbox"/> 15	> 2:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 3
	5	<input type="checkbox"/> 30	<input type="checkbox"/> 21	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 11			21-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 20	> 3:1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4
	6	<input type="checkbox"/> 35	<input type="checkbox"/> 24	<input type="checkbox"/> 13			31-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 25	> 4:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 6
	≥ 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 40	<input type="checkbox"/> 28	<input type="checkbox"/> 15			> 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 30	> 5:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 8
						> 6:1 <input type="checkbox"/> 10		

## B. ECOLOGICAL/HABITAT BENEFITS (maximum score 10 points):

This section of the form is used to help further define the benefits of the application mainly with respect to size of the site and its proximity to other permanently protected habitats.

Larger easement parcels provide better wildlife habitat and are less prone to the edge effects caused by smaller parcel sizes. Using a sliding scale, RIM Wetlands sites with larger acres being enrolled are allowed more points. Easement parcels in close proximity to other permanently protected habitat is similarly important in building complexes and minimizing predation. Points are allowed depending upon how much other habitat is permanently protected within a 1.5 mile radius of the proposed RIM Wetlands easement boundary.

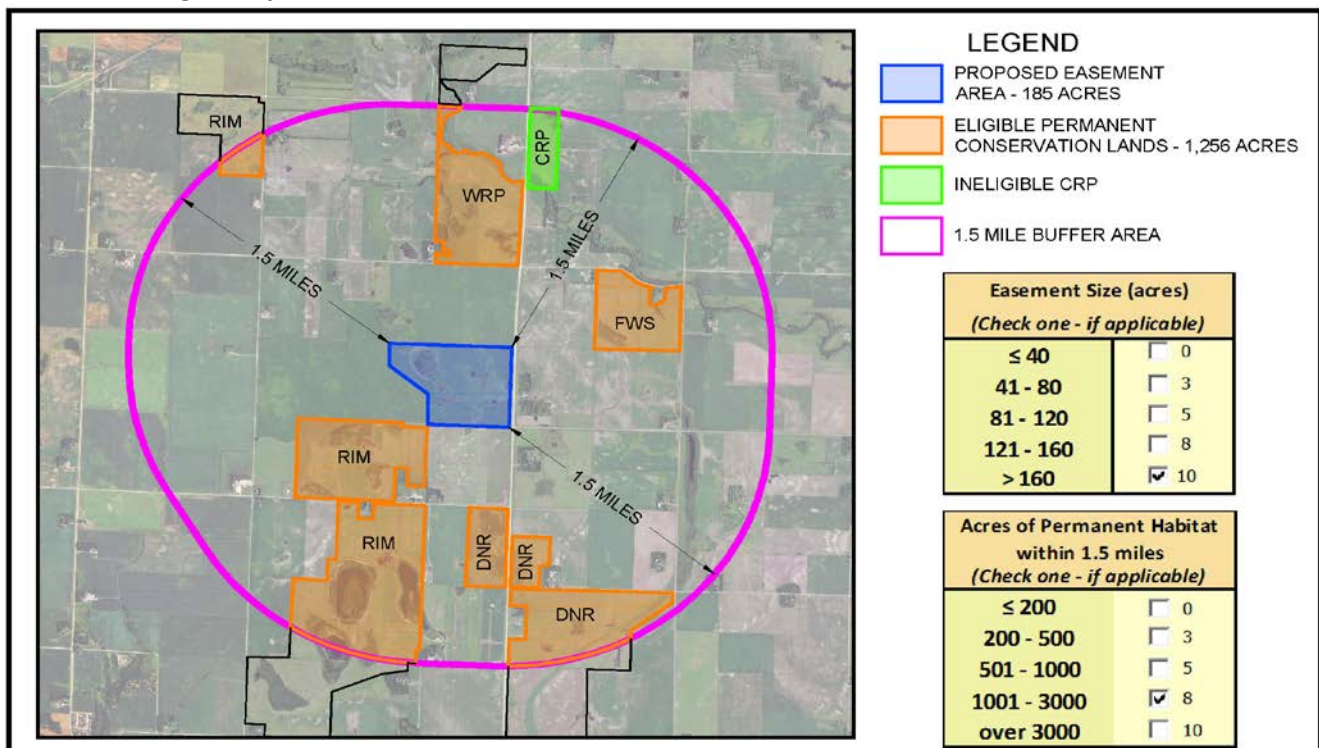
To quickly show the 1.5 mile buffer in your mapping software, perform the following steps:

1. Enable the "editor" toolbar: Customize > Toolbars > Editor
2. With the editing toolbar selector, select your easement boundary shapefile/layer
3. On the editor toolbar, select "Editor" and then "Start Editing"
4. If a dialog appears, choose your easement boundary shapefile/layer and hit "OK"
5. On the editor toolbar, select "Editor" and then "Buffer"
6. Click "Template" and again choose your boundary shapefile/layer and hit "OK"
7. Under Distance, enter exactly "1.5mi" including the units
8. Your 1.5 mile buffer will now appear. You can optionally save your edits to retain the buffer.
9. Measure the acreage of any "permanent conservation lands" within the buffer distance using the ArcGIS Measure Tool: <http://resources.arcgis.com/en/help/main/10.1/index.html#//00s500000022000000>

Permanent Habitat shall mean those areas that are permanently protected, including but not limited to: DNR WMAs, SNA's, Public Waters/Wetlands, USFWS WPAs, State and Federal Wildlife Refuges, Nature Conservancy Preserves and Managed Areas, State and National Forests, perpetual RIM, WRP, and USFWS Conservation Easements, etc.

This should not include CRP lands or lands enrolled in other short term conservation programs.

### Section B Scoring Example:



**C. ADDITIONAL WILDLIFE BENEFITS (*maximum score 20 points*):**

Landscape position is an important factor in maximizing wildlife value. Up to 20 points may be earned depending upon where in the state the parcel is located. Score is based using Appendix 1 and GIS data that was developed by the USFWS HAPET Office. This data and map were developed using grassland nesting waterfowl along with other migratory species and wetland dependent wildlife as primary factors.

Using **Appendix 1** and GIS data identify the location of the RIM Wetlands site and determine its score.

**D. EASEMENT VALUE BENEFITS (*maximum score 10 points*):**

Additional points are being offered to landowners who agree to reduce the value of their easement payment. If points are taken, the final easement payment to the landowner will be adjusted accordingly.

The Easement Payment Calculation Worksheet should be completed as part of reviewing this section with the applicant. The easement payment worksheet will allow the applicant to make an informed decision of the financial impact a percent payment reduction will have on their overall easement payment.

NOTE – Once a landowner agrees to a reduction in their easement payment via application submittal, it will be treated as an irrevocable decision for this sign-up, regardless as to whether the additional score was needed to attain a score high enough to be funded.

**E. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS (*maximum score 10 points*):**

Additional water quality and other environmental considerations are credited in this section. Mark all applicable checkboxes. Documentation must be provided for Considerations 1 thru 6 in this section. This documentation should be in the form specified below.

**Consideration 1:** Aerial photo with applicable GIS layer displayed of application's location with respect to Prairie Plan Core or Corridor areas.

**Consideration 2:** Aerial photo with applicable GIS layer displayed of application's location with respect to 1 mile radius of Federal or State listed Endangered or Threatened species.

**Consideration 3:** Attach a copy of the specific citation from the plan, including document name and page number(s).

**Consideration 4:** Aerial photo with applicable GIS layer displayed of application's location with respect to 1/2 mile radius of downstream DNR Protected Waters or designated aquatic management areas.

**Consideration 5:** Aerial photo with location of application displayed with respect to identified TMDL or WRAP area.

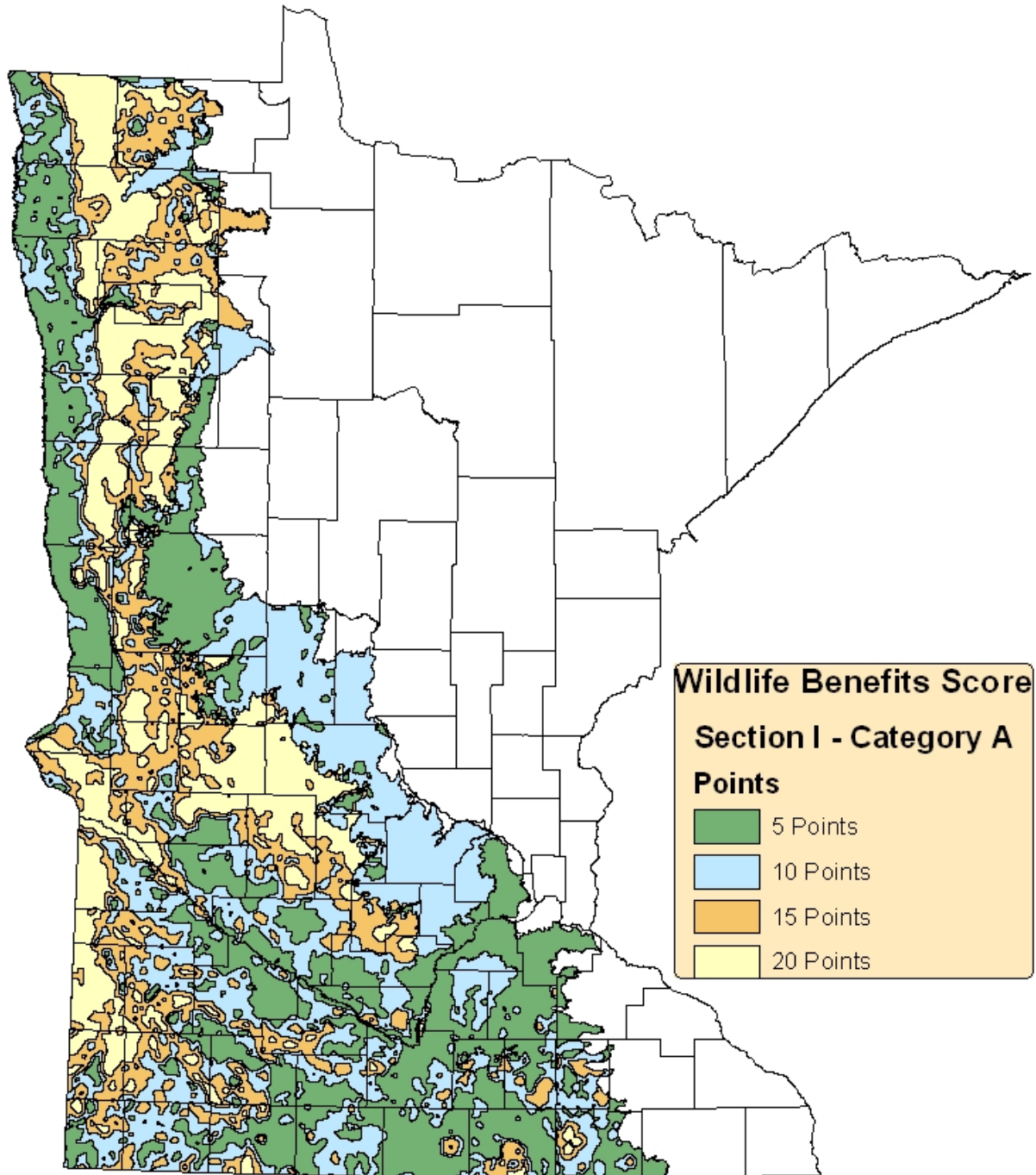
**Consideration 6:** Aerial photo with location of application displayed with respect to identified Wellhead Protection Area.

Some of the GIS shapefiles used to make these determinations are located on the RIM Wetlands signup webpage, including:

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan 2010 Core and Corridor Area. See **Appendix 2** for these boundaries.
- DNR Protected Waters Inventory
- MN Department of Health identified Wellhead Protection Areas



## Appendix 1 - Wildlife Benefits



## Appendix 2 - Prairie Core and Corridor Areas

